



## Aruba Special Olympics Committee begins gearing up for Beijing 2007.

November is usually the time when the Foundation for the Mentally Disabled (SVGA) coupled with the Special Olympics Committee would conduct their annual games. Last year they welcomed competitors from Curacao, Bonaire, and St. Martaan to compete in the fifth Aruban Special Olympics.

This year, the SVGA revealed that they will conduct their annual games differently. Rather than a week of varied events, they are hosting a day of competitions monthly, for various reasons. The first such day took place on Saturday, November 4 with a bocce ball competition combined with their monthly family day. Tuyo Werleman, Director of the SVGA expressed that this will allow the organization to save their money to transport their athletes to the games, and specialize in training them for the various events. These special days will be held usually on the first Saturday of each month and will act as qualifying heats to select the athletes that will attend the International Special Olympics in Beijing in 2007, provided the committee obtains the needed funding. The defending champions from Man Na Obra of Jeffrey Croes, Vanessa Bernabela, Jacqueline Geil, Gisella Thijsen, and Reynold Wernet received gold medals on Saturday, with the Sonrisa team taking the silver, and the Duneman team taking third place. Tuyo Werleman explained that many more qualifying rounds are yet to be held, and that a national team will likely consist of the best players from a number of schools.

For the “clients” of the SVGA, the Special Olympics is an event that they look forward to and work for as hard as the athletes that compete in the World Olympic Games. The self-esteem they gain, and the socialization during the games is invaluable in their continued development and helping them to lead productive lives. By combining these events with their monthly family day, Tuyo Werleman revealed that it increased the positive influence on the athletes, as it enforces the support from their families. A number of events have yet to take place, including fundraising for the trip to China, and will begin in earnest in January, after the holiday season.